



# Small Group Study Guide

By Dave Runyon & Jay Pathak

## Welcome

Dear Hosts, Thank you for opening up your home and for your willingness to facilitate this experience for your group. We hope and pray that this study will be a powerful tool for you personally and for everyone in your group. The text in the BLUE throughout this guide is content designed to help you facilitate significant conversations with your group. The text in BLACK is what the participants in your group will see during each session.

When Jesus was asked to sum up everyone into one command, he said to love God with everything we have *and* to love our neighbors as ourselves. Most of us have turned this simple idea of loving our neighbors into a nice saying, putting it on bumperstickers and refrigerator magnets and then going on with our lives without actually putting it into practice.

What would happen if every follower of Jesus took the Great Commandment literally? Is it possible that the solution to our society's biggest issues has been right under our noses for the past two thousand years?

## How Change Happens

Have you ever decided that you want to work out and do a better job taking care of your body? Or, have you ever made a commitment to breaking a bad habit? Most of us have something that we want to change about our behavior and yet very few of us have figured out how to actually do it.

Changing our minds is relatively easy, changing our behaviors is a lot harder. Even when we change some of our behaviors, we quickly realize that it's even harder to change our motivations and desires. It's one thing to know you should work out, it's another thing to actually make your way to the gym and start sweating.

If you are reading this, it's likely that you believe certain things about God and how he has instructed us to live. You are probably aware that there is a big difference between believing something and actually doing it. Most people know that they should work out and break a few of their most obvious bad habits, but very few actually learn how to live differently and become the kind of person that Jesus is calling them to be.

Over the next few weeks we're going to give you an invitation to get back to the basics and to actually take the second half of the great commandment literally. The vast majority of us wish that we were closer to our neighbors, but that is often where it stops. The real question is this, "How can we become better neighbors?"

## **Take Small Steps**

The way to become a better neighbor is by learning to take a series of small steps in the same direction. You won't become the kind of neighbor you want to be thinking really hard about it. You'll only become a great neighbor by following the bread crumbs and taking small steps that lead you into a new way of living. In order to become a good neighbor, we must move beyond knowing and start doing.

## **Form Habits**

40-45% of the decisions that we make are habit. When you suddenly become aware that you are at your destination and aren't sure how you got there...that is a result of your habits. Growing in your neighboring skills requires forming habits that enable you to become a great neighbor. The key to life change is making small movements that lead us down the road towards a new way of living.

Most of what we're going to encourage you to do over the next few weeks will seem small and simple. The steps might seem repetitive at times and that is intentional. If you engage each week we are confident that you will form some new habits that will help you to live out what Jesus said matters most.

The first and most important step is to learn, retain, and use the names of your literal neighbors. At the end of every session, you will share with your group the progress that you are making in this area.

## **How to Make the Most Out of Your Group Experience**

We want to encourage you to lean into the repetition and allow the people in your small group to hold you accountable to doing some small things that will make a big difference. As with any small group, what you get out of it is directly related to what you put into it. That is why we have designed this study in such a way that allows you time to process with your group, as well as time to reflect and pray on your own. In order to maximize your growth and experience over the next six weeks, we recommend that you do the following:

### **BEFORE Each Group Session**

1. Read the assigned chapter(s) before each meeting and avoid reading at the last minute. Find a quiet place where you can truly process the material and encounter the God who wants to transform your heart and mind.

2. Read through the questions and write down your responses. Take time to write down what you really think, even if it might be unpopular, controversial, and jot down any questions you still might have. In short, be honest! Avoid waiting until the last minute and just trying to quickly fill-in the “right answers.”

3. Communicate with your host if you need to miss a session for any reason.

### **DURING Each Group Session**

1. Participate by sharing your honest thoughts. Go one small step past your normal comfort zone.

2. Respect the hosts by following their direction and staying on topic.

3. Respect others in the group by allowing for equal participation. If you are an extrovert and a verbal processor, try to keep your comments concise. If you are an introvert, please share! The group will benefit from hearing your thoughts.

4. Help create a safe environment for honest discussion by not divulging other people’s personal information.

### **CONCLUDE Each Group Session (the most important part!)**

1. Go through the three exercises: Block Map, Pray for a Neighbor, Share a next step

2. These three steps will happen every week. These steps help you take small steps that build momentum in an atmosphere of accountability. This is how habits form and you will become a different kind of neighbor.

3. Listen carefully to everyone’s presentation of their block map, prayers and next steps. Listen so you can be praying for the other people in the group throughout the week.

### **AFTER Each Group Session**

1. Reflect on the topic and discussion by filling out the “On Your Own” journaling section.

2. Pray. Ask God to do what only He can do – change your heart to be more like His!

3. Actually do the Next Step that you identified each week. Take action and share with your group about what you experienced!

4. Have fun with this!

Welcome to The Art of Neighboring!

# Session One: The Call To Neighboring

**Assigned Reading = Chapters 1 & 2**

## Getting Started

Share about your neighborhood and the types of relationships that you have with the people who live on your street or in your building. On a scale of 1 to 10, how “connected” is your current neighborhood?

**Play the Video:** <https://vimeo.com/117428367>

## Discussion Questions

1. What was your big take away from this week’s reading and/or the video? What stuck out to you? What did you like? What was difficult or confusing?
2. Read Acts 17:26-27.
  - A. What jumps out at you from this passage? How does it fit the context of the rest of his sermon in Acts 17? [Any comments and questions are fine here. We want people to process the Scripture together and give their honest thoughts.](#)
  - B. Do you have any “invisible” neighbors (page 17)? Do you think you are invisible to them as well? How does it end up like this? [Allow for open sharing. Note: Invisible neighbors are simply the neighbors that we see but don’t yet know.](#)
  - C. According to Acts 17 that we just read, why do we live where we live? Why has God placed us in our neighborhoods? What about those that surround us? Why are they there?  
[We are hoping people make these types of observations:](#)
    - 1 – God has a hand in determining where people live.
    - 2 – Where we live isn’t all about us – sometimes God puts us in places so that those around us (our neighbors) can find HIM!
3. In chapter one, the mayor states, “The majority of the issues that our community is facing would be eliminated or drastically reduced if we could just figure out a way to become a community of great neighbors.” To what extent do you think this is true? Why don’t government programs alone solve the problems of society? [Allow for open sharing. We are hoping people see that government programs are not the only, nor necessarily the best, solution to social problems.](#)
4. Luke 10:29 says this about the teacher of the law: “But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” In what ways do we attempt to justify ourselves in

order to avoid taking the Great Commandment literally? In what ways are you tempted to make a “neighbor” into a metaphor? Jesus was trying to get the Jewish people to see outside their ethnic boundaries by showing that ANYONE can be their neighbor. The authors make the point that the Jewish people were already good at caring for their actual neighbors so Jesus was giving them the “graduate level” definition. We tend to do the opposite in our culture. Since we mostly agree that everyone is our neighbor, we tend to neglect our geographic neighbors and give the word neighbor a more metaphorical definition. It is critical that we understand that Jesus calls us to love our actual neighbors. It is important for this to soak in since this will be a shift in thinking for many people. As long as people define neighbor as a metaphor, they will justify neglecting their geographic neighbors.

5. What would happen if everyone made it a point to know and befriend their literal neighbors? This is a good opportunity for people to dream together about how the world would change if this were true.

## Moving Forward

At the conclusion of each gathering we will do 3 things. Often groups lose track of time and end up rushing through the second half of the content. We strongly believe that these 3 exercises are the most important part of this study. If you only have time to do one section each week...do this one!

1. Do the Block Map - Take out the block map and fill it in right now... just start with the names of your neighbors... (Allow for extra time to do the map this first time around)

Go around the room and share how many of the names you knew? Did you have any epiphanies as you did this exercise? What did you learn or feel as a result of doing this exercise? Most people naturally feel a little guilty when they realize how little they know about their neighbors. Allow people to feel what they feel, but this is definitely NOT the time to try to make people feel guilty or that they are not doing enough. Allow God to work on people in HIS timing. As a host you might feel like you should know more of your neighbors since you are a host. Avoid that temptation. We are all on this journey together and we all have room to grow. Let people see you are real and honest and that you don't have it all figured out either. Your group will trust you more for your honesty!

Write the names of your neighbors by listing out the names of the adults and children of the 8 closest houses or apartment units next to you. Pay attention to the blank spaces (YOU SHOULD HAVE already done this earlier in this first session). Every other week you will go around and share how many neighbors you know by name and if you have made any progress since the last meetings. Take a second and identify each of the neighbors and decide if they are a stranger, acquaintance, or relationship.

2. Identify one neighbor that you are going to pray for during the next week. Take time to pray in the group for the neighbors that were mentioned.

3. Share one small “next step” that you feel God is calling you to take in the next 7 days.  
Options they might choose:

- ~Learn a specific neighbor's name
- ~Invite a couple over for dinner
- ~Ask a neighbor for advice on how to take care of your lawn because their's is nicer
- ~Have everyone share that step out loud and write them down so that everyone can be praying throughout the week.

\*Remind everyone to read chapter 3 and remind them when the next meeting time is!

### **On Your Own**

Take a few minutes to journal about your past experiences with neighboring. How do you think God might want to stretch you over the next six weeks? [Encourage people to take some time to reflect on the session and do the "On Your Own" journaling.](#)

\*Read Chapter 3 before the next meeting

# WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?



YOU ARE HERE



# Session Two: The Time Barrier

## Assigned Reading = Chapter 3

### Getting Started

What was the “next step” that you shared the last time we were together? How did it go?

Go around the room and have everyone share.

Play the video: <https://vimeo.com/117428368>

### Discussion Questions

1. What was your big take away from this week’s reading and/or video? What stuck out to you? What did you like? What was difficult or confusing?
2. Read Luke 10:38-42
  - A. Do you associate more with Martha or Mary? If you were going to defend Martha in that moment what would you want to say? [Any comments and questions are fine here.](#) [We want people to process the Scripture together and give their honest thoughts.](#)
  - B. Discuss the following myths and how you see them impacting our culture (pages 45-46).
    - i. Things will settle down someday.
    - ii. More will be enough.
    - iii. Everybody lives like this.[Allow for open sharing. Help stretch people’s thinking here. What are the very real impacts on people’s lives from thinking these thoughts? What do they do to our pace of life? What do they do to our relationships?](#)
  - C. Which of the three myths do you struggle with the most? How does that reveal itself in your life? [Allow for open sharing.](#)
3. Imagine yourself with the time it would take to be a great neighbor. What are the things you would have to sacrifice to make that a reality? Why would it be worth it? What could change in your life or in your neighborhood? [This is a strategy often used in counseling. If people can imagine a healthier way of living, the steps to get there become clear. It can be very daunting to think about cutting activities in our lives. Imagining a better way of living can give people the motivation to make some hard choices. You may want to start by having people imagine together what it even means to be a great neighbor.](#)
4. On page 48 Dave shares about the tension that that he felt when making a decision about which sports league to enroll his son in. As you consider the issue of margin in your own life, what could you say “no” to, in order to spend more time in your neighborhood? [Allow for open sharing.](#)

## Moving Forward

Again, this is the way you'll close every session and this is the most important part of this study. Manage your time well and resist the temptation to cut this part short!

1. Do the Block Map - Write the names of your neighbors by listing out the names of the adults and children of the 8 closest houses or apartment units next to you and pay attention to the blank spaces. Take a second and identify each of the neighbors and decide if they are a stranger, acquaintance, or relationship. Go around and share how many neighbors you know by name and if you have made any progress since the last meeting.
2. Identify one neighbor that you are going to pray for over the next week. [Take time to pray in the group for the neighbors that were mentioned.](#)
3. Share one small "next step" that you feel God is calling you to take in the next 7 days.  
[Options they might choose:](#)
  - ~Learn a specific neighbor's name
  - ~Invite a couple over for dinner
  - ~Ask a neighbor for advice on how to take care of your lawn because their's is nicer
  - ~Have everyone share that step out loud and write them down so that everyone can be praying throughout the week.

[\\*Remind everyone to read chapter 4 and remind them when the next meeting time is!](#)

## On Your Own

Look at your calendar and do an audit of how you have spent your time over the last two weeks. Reflect on how well your calendar is aligned with your priorities.

[\\*Read Chapter 4 before the next meeting \(catch up by reading chapters 1-3 if you are behind\)](#)

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# Session Three: The Fear Factor

Assigned Reading = Chapter 4

## Getting Started

What was the “next step” that you shared the last time we were together? How did it go?

Go around the room and have everyone share.

Play the video: <https://vimeo.com/117436824>

## Discussion Questions

1. What was your big take away from this week’s reading and/or video? What stuck out to you? What did you like? What was difficult or confusing?
2. Read Luke 5:27-32
  - A. Are you uncomfortable about spending time with anyone on your block? Anyone you would feel strange being seen with? Why? *We all battle hidden judgements and fears. Sometimes we are aware of the way we are seeing others and sometimes we are really just afraid of how others will see us. We all have certain types of people that we are tempted to judge.*
3. Discuss the impact that the 24 hour media cycle has on your world view. What are you afraid of that you have only seen on the news? *Everyone feels a little sick after watching the news. We are suddenly afraid of things that we didn’t even know existed before we watched it. We’re afraid of all kinds of things like sicknesses, bed bugs, and terrorism, but we’re really frightened by the people that might be surrounding us.*
4. What’s the worse case scenario if you engaged your neighbors? Does knowing them increase the likelihood of your worst case scenario? *We are all afraid that the horrible stuff that we see on the news is living around us. It’s easier to hide and hope it will go away. The irony is that this isolation ends up making us more suspicious and fearful. If these kinds of people are living around us it would be WAY better to know that. And usually we realize that they aren’t who we were afraid that they are.*
5. Who do you think is scared of you? Why? *Most of us don’t realize that our fears make people afraid of us. We perpetuate the cycle by withdrawing and end up making people afraid of us. While we’re busy guessing who they are and believing the worst, they are often doing the same thing about us. Someone has to break the cycle.*
6. What do you think are the main reasons people are often afraid of their neighbors? Do you have any fears or concerns about the people in your neighborhood? *How would it be different if*

you knew their story? We usually have mercy for others when we understand their story. It is the unknown that leads us to make assumptions and leads us to keep our distance.

## **Moving Forward**

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1. Do the Block Map - Write the names of your neighbors by listing out the names of the adults and children of the 8 closest houses or apartment units next to you and pay attention to the blank spaces. Take a second and identify each of the neighbors and decide if they are a stranger, acquaintance, or relationship. Go around and share how many neighbors you know by name and if you have made any progress since the last meeting.

2. Identify one neighbor that you are going to pray for over the next week. [Take time to pray in the group for the neighbors that were mentioned.](#)

3. Share one small “next step” that you feel God is calling you to take in the next 7 days.

[Options they might choose:](#)

[~Learn a specific neighbor's name](#)

[~Invite a couple over for dinner](#)

[~Ask a neighbor for advice on how to take care of your lawn because their's is nicer](#)

[~Have everyone share that step out loud and write them down so that everyone can be praying throughout the week.](#)

[\\*Remind everyone to read chapter 7 and remind them when the next meeting time is!](#)

## **On Your Own**

Journal about a time that you overcame a fear. What were the steps that you took in completing that process?

[\\*Read Chapter 7 before the next meeting](#)

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# Session Four: Motives Matter

Assigned Reading = Chapter 7

## Getting Started

What was the “next step” that you shared the last time we were together? How did it go?

Go around the room and have everyone share.

Play the video: <https://vimeo.com/117428370>

## Discussion Questions

1. What was your big take away from this week’s reading and/or video? What stuck out to you? What did you like? What was difficult or confusing?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:8b and Matthew 5:14-16
  - A. Are you comfortable sharing your story and telling people about the impact Jesus has had on your life? When did you last share your story with someone? What makes it hard to do this? **Most people will likely not have shared their story in the recent past. Again, this is NOT the time for a guilt trip. Let God do the convicting. We just want people to be honest about where they are at and why. There are many reasons people do not share their faith. Hopefully the next question will help them see it’s not as hard as they might think!**
3. "We don't love our neighbors to convert them, we love them because we are converted" (p. 102) **Discuss the tension in this statement.**
4. Instead of sharing your story first, have you ever tried asking others about their story? How can you focus on listening and create a safe place for honest two-way sharing? What kind of questions help people share their story at a deeper level? What’s the deepest moment you’ve ever had hearing another person’s story? **Many people don’t share their story because a) it never comes up, b) they don’t know where to start, or c) they are afraid they don’t know all the right Christian answers and verses. Sometimes fear comes because we are too focused on sharing and not enough on listening. If we would simply ask someone to tell us their story or spiritual journey, they are likely to tell us. If we are a safe friend, they are also likely to ask us about our story. This is not manipulation; it is simply how normal conversation happens in real relationships. We are interested in the other person and what we can learn from them and vice versa.**

## Moving Forward

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2. Identify one neighbor that you are going to pray for over the next week. [Take time to pray in the group for the neighbors that were mentioned.](#)
3. Share one small "next step" that you feel God is calling you to take in the next 7 days.  
[Options they might choose:](#)
  - ~Learn a specific neighbor's name
  - ~Invite a couple over for dinner
  - ~Ask a neighbor for advice on how to take care of your lawn because their's is nicer
  - ~Have everyone share that step out loud and write them down so that everyone can be praying throughout the week.

[\\*Remind everyone to read chapter 8 and remind them when the next meeting time is!](#)

## On Your Own

Reflect on the biggest obstacles that exist for you to share your faith. Journal some of your fears and prayers regarding sharing your faith.

What have you learned through this whole process? Take some time and write some things you've learned/are learning about neighboring in general.

[\\*Read Chapter 8 before the next meeting](#)

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# Session 5: The Art of Receiving

## Assigned Reading = Chapter 8

### Getting Started

What was the “next step” that you shared the last time we were together? How did it go?

Go around the room and have everyone share.

Play the video: <https://vimeo.com/117428373>

### Discussion Questions

1. What was your big take away from this week’s reading and/or video? What stuck out to you? What did you like? What was difficult or confusing?
2. Read 1 Kings 17:7-16
  - A. Why didn’t God just provide for Elijah directly? How do you think it felt to have to ask the widow for help? How do you think the widow felt? **This must have been difficult for both of them and God chose this as a way of showing how He was stretching out to those outside of the boundaries of the Jewish people. Jesus refers to this moment in Luke 4:26. It would have been difficult for both of them to make sense of this moment but they both grew to understand more about God and what He is like.**
3. What are your neighbors knowledgeable and/or passionate about? How could you enter into their world and allow them to serve you? **Our neighbors have a lot to offer and are often willing to offer it if we will humble ourselves and ask. We want to learn how to watch for ways to humble ourselves and give people the joy of serving us.**
4. Are you good at allowing other people to care for you? What makes it hard? How often do you ask for help from someone outside of your immediate family? **Allow for open sharing. Many Christians (and Americans in general) have a tendency toward “paternalism,” the idea that WE have something to offer because we are Christians, but THEY do not because they are not Christians. Paternalism puts one party in the position of power and the other in the position of need. Real relationship requires give and take – nobody with all the power and nobody with all the need. It steals a person’s dignity to force them to always be in the position of need and never receive help from them. We should try to maintain balance as much as possible. If we are always the one in power, we should ask for help. If we are always the one in need, we should realize we have a lot to give to others.**
5. “The art of receiving is not complicated. It comes down to being aware of our own needs. It’s about opening our eyes, then being vulnerable enough to ask and receive” (page 128). What current needs do you have that a neighbor might be able to help you with? **Allow for open sharing.**

## Moving Forward

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3. Share one small “next step” that you feel God is calling you to take in the next 7 days.  
Options they might choose:
  - ~Learn a specific neighbor's name
  - ~Invite a couple over for dinner
  - ~Ask a neighbor for advice on how to take care of your lawn because their's is nicer
  - ~Have everyone share that step out loud and write them down so that everyone can be praying throughout the week.

\*Remind everyone to read chapter 11 and remind them when the next meeting time is!

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# Session 6: Peacemaking

**Assigned Reading = Chapter 11**

## Getting Started

What was the “next step” that you shared the last time we were together? How did it go?

Go around the room and have everyone share.

**Play the video: <https://vimeo.com/117428375>**

## Discussion Questions

1. What was your big take away from this week’s reading and/or video? What stuck out to you? What did you like? What was difficult or confusing?
2. Read Romans 12:17-18
  - A. How do we know if we've done everything that depends on us? Is this even possible?  
It is likely that there will be some tension in people within your group when thinking about this. Allow people to share and expect some confusion around this difficult topic.
3. Share about a conflict you had with a neighbor. If you’ve not had one, have you witnessed one? What could have happened differently? Most people are likely to share about something they have seen rather than share in the first person.
4. What happens over time when you fail to forgive people who have wronged you? Allow for open sharing.
5. Have you ever become friends with someone that you once considered an enemy? How? Hopefully someone has a story here, but be prepared to share a story of your own just in case.
6. Is there a conflict in your neighborhood that you could be a peacemaker in? Allow for sharing and have the group work together to help figure out different ways that peacemaking can be done in the scenarios shared.

## Moving Forward

1. Check out the website: [artofneighboring.com](http://artofneighboring.com) and tel us about your journey through this experience.
2. Be sure to send your small group leader and pastor an email telling them what you learned through this experience and the best story you heard from your group.
3. Check out these web-sites for more information on how to throw a great block party and take the next step in your neighboring journey.

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